In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND HER HUSBAND

Marriage in Islam

In Islam, marriage is a blessed contract between a man and a woman, in which each becomes "permitted" to the other, and they begin the long journey of life in a spirit of love, co-operation, harmony and tolerance, where each feels at ease with the other, and finds tranquility, contentment and comfort in the company of the other. The Qur'aan has described this relationship between men and women, which brings love, harmony, trust and compassion, in the most moving and eloquent terms:

(And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your [hearts] . . . (Qur'aan 30:21)

This is the strongest of bonds, in which Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) unites the two Muslim partners, who come together on the basis of love, understanding, co-operation and mutual advice, and establish a Muslim family in which children will live and grow up, and they will develop the good character and behavior taught by Islam. The Muslim family is the strongest component of a Muslim society when its members are productive and constructive, helping and encouraging one another to be good and righteous, and competing with one another in good works.

The righteous woman is the pillar, cornerstone and foundation of the Muslim family. She is seen as the greatest joy in a man's life, as the Prophet said:

"This world is just temporary conveniences, and the best comfort in this world is a righteous woman."[1]

A righteous woman is the greatest blessing that Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) can give to a man, for with her he can find comfort and rest after the exhausting struggle of earning a living. With his wife, he can find incomparable tranquility and pleasure.

How can a woman be the best comfort in this world? How can she be a successful woman, true to her own femininity, and honored and loved? This is what will be explained in the following pages:

She chooses a good husband

One of the ways in which Islam has honored woman is by giving her the right to choose her husband. Her parents have no right to force her to marry someone she dislikes. The Muslim woman knows this right, but she does not reject the advice and guidance of her parents when a potential suitor comes along, because they have her best interests at heart, and they have more experience of life and people. At the same time, she does not forego this right because of her father's wishes that may make him force his daughter into a marriage with someone she dislikes.

There are many texts that support the woman in this sensitive issue, for example the report quoted by Imam Al-Bukhaari from al-Khansa' bint Khidam:

"My father married me to his nephew, and I did not like this match, so I complained to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He said to me: 'Accept what your father has arranged.' I said, 'I do not wish to accept what my father has arranged.' He said, 'Then this marriage is invalid, go and marry whomever you wish.' I said, 'I have accepted what my father has arranged, but I wanted women to know that fathers have no right in their daughter's matters (i.e. they have no right to force a marriage on them).'"[2]

At first, the Prophet ﷺ told al-Khansa' to obey her father, and this is as it should be, because the concern of fathers for their daughters' well being is well known. But when he realized that her father wanted to force her into a marriage she did not want, he gave her the freedom to choose, and saved her from the oppression of a father who wanted to force her into an unwanted marriage.

Islam does not want to impose an unbearable burden on women by forcing them to marry a man they dislike, because it wants marriages to be successful, based on compatibility between the partners; there should be common ground between them in terms of physical looks, attitudes, habits, inclinations and aspirations. If something goes wrong, and the woman feels that she cannot love her husband sincerely, and fears that she may commit the sin of disobeying and opposing this husband whom she does not love, then she may ask for a divorce. This is confirmed by the report in which the wife of Thabit ibn Qays ibn Shammas, Jamilah the sister of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: "O Messenger of Allah, I have nothing against Thabit ibn Qays as regards his religion or his behavior, but I hate to commit any act of *kufr* when I am a Muslim. The Prophet ﷺ said: "Will you give his garden back to him?" - her *mahr* had been a garden. She said, "Yes." So the Messenger of Allah sent word to him: "Take back your garden, and give her one pronouncement of divorce."[3]

According to a report given by Al-Bukhaari from Ibn 'Abbas, she said, "I do not blame Thabit for anything with regard to his religion or his behavior, but I do not like him."

Islam has protected woman's pride and humanity, and has respected her wishes with regard to the choice of a husband with whom she will spend the rest of her life. It is not acceptable for anyone, no matter who he is, to force a woman into a marriage with a man she does not like.

There is no clearer indication of this than the story of Barirah, an Ethiopian slave-girl who belonged to 'Utbah ibn Abu Lahab, who forced her to marry another slave whose name was Mughith. She would never have accepted him as a husband if she had been in control of her own affairs. 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) took pity on her, so she bought her and set her free. Then this young woman felt that she was free and in control of her own affairs, and that she could take a decision about her marriage. She asked her husband for a divorce. Her husband used to follow her, weeping, whilst she rejected him. Al-Bukhaari quotes Ibn 'Abbas describing this freed woman who insisted on the annulment of her marriage to someone she did not love; the big-hearted Prophet ﷺ commented on this moving sight, and sought to intervene. Ibn 'Abbas said:

> "Barirah's husband was a slave, who was known as Mughith. I can almost see him, running after her and crying, with tears running down onto his beard. The Prophet ﷺ said to 'Abbas, 'O 'Abbas, do you not find it strange, how much Mugith loves Barirah, and how much Barirah hates Mughith?' The Prophet ﷺ said (to Barirah), 'Why do you not go back to him?' She said, 'O Messenger of Allah, are you commanding me to do so?' He said, 'I am merely trying to intervene on his behalf.' She said, 'I have no need of him.'"[4]

The Prophet ﷺ was deeply moved by this display of human emotion: deep and overwhelming love on the part of the husband, and equally powerful hatred on the part of the wife. He could not help but remind the wife, and ask her why she did not go back to him, as he was her husband and the father of her child. This believing woman asked him, whether he was ordering her to do so: was this a command, a binding obligation? The Prophet ﷺ, this great law-giver and educator, replied that he was merely trying to intercede and bring about reconciliation if possible; he was not trying to force anybody to do something they did not wish

to. Let those stubborn, hard-hearted fathers who oppress their own daughters listen to the teaching of the Prophet ﷺ!

The Muslim woman who understands the teachings of her religion has wise and correct standards when it comes to choosing a husband. She does not concern herself just with good looks, high status, a luxurious lifestyle or any of the other things that usually attract women. She looks into his level of religious commitment and his attitude and behavior, because these are the pillars of a successful marriage, and the best features of a husband. Islamic teaching indicates the importance of these qualities in a potential husband, as Islam obliges a woman to accept the proposal of anyone who has these qualities, lest *fitnah* and corruption become widespread in society:

“If there comes to you one with whose religion and attitude you are satisfied, then give your daughter to him in marriage, for if you do not do so, *fitnah* and mischief will become widespread on earth.”[5]

Just as the true Muslim young man will not be attracted to the pretty girls who have grown up in a bad environment, so the Muslim young woman who is guided by her religion will not be attracted to stupid “play-boy” types, no matter how handsome they may be. Rather she will be attracted to the serious, educated, believing man who is clean-living and pure of heart, whose behavior is good and whose understanding of religion is sound. No one is a suitable partner for the good, believing woman except a good, believing man; and no one is a suitable partner for the wayward, immoral woman but a wayward, immoral man, as Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) has said:

Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure, and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity . . . (Qur’aan 24:26)

This does not mean that the Muslim woman should completely ignore the matter of physical appearance, and put up with unattractiveness or ugliness. It is her right - as stated above - to marry a man for whom her heart may be filled with love, and who is pleasing to her both in his appearance and in his conduct. Appearance should not be neglected at the expense of inner nature, or vice versa. A woman should choose a man who is attractive to her in all aspects, one who will gain her admiration and respect. The true Muslim woman is never dazzled by outward appearances, and she never lets them distract her from seeing the essence of a potential spouse.

The Muslim woman knows that the man has the right of *qiwaamah* over her, as the Qur’aan says:

(Men are the protectors and maintainers [qawwaamun] of women, because Allah has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means . . .) (Qur’aan 4:34)

Hence she wants to marry a man of whose *qiwaamah* over her she will feel proud, one whom she will be happy to marry and never regret it. She wants a man who will take her hand in his and set out to fulfill their life’s mission of establishing a Muslim family and raising a new generation of intelligent and caring children, in an atmosphere of love and harmony, which will not be impeded by conflicting attitudes or religious differences. Believing men and believing women are supposed to walk side-by-side on the journey of life, which is a serious matter for the believer, so that they may fulfill the great mission with which Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) has entrusted mankind, men and women alike, as the Qur’aan says:

(For Muslim men and women - for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are constant and patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast [and deny themselves], for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah’s praise - for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.) **(Qur’aan 33:35)**

In order to achieve this great goal of strengthening the marriage bond, and establishing a stable family life, it is essential to choose the right partner in the first place.

Among the great Muslim women who are known for their strength of character, lofty aspirations and far-sightedness in their choice of a husband is Umm Sulaym bint Milhan, who was one of the first *Ansaar* women to embrace Islam. She was married to Malik ibn Nadar, and bore him a son, Anas. When she embraced Islam, her husband Malik was angry with her, and left her, but she persisted in her Islam. Shortly afterwards, she heard the news of his death, and she was still in the flower of her youth. She bore it all with the hope of reward, for the sake of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), and devoted herself to taking care of her ten-year-old son Anas. She took him to the Prophet ﷺ, so that he could serve him (and learn from him).

One of the best young men of Madinah, one of the best looking, richest and strongest, came to seek her hand in marriage. This was Abu Talhah - before he became Muslim. Many of the young women of Yathrib liked him because of his wealth, strength and youthful good looks, and he thought that Umm Sulaym would joyfully rush to accept his offer. But to his astonishment, she told him, "O Abu Talhah, do you not know that your god whom you worship is just a tree that grew in the ground and was carved into shape by the slave of Banu so-and-so." He said, "Of course." She said, "Do you not feel ashamed to prostrate yourself to a piece of wood that grew in the ground and was carved by the slave of Banu so-and-so?" Abu Talhah was stubborn, and hinted to her of an expensive dowry and luxurious lifestyle, but she persisted in her point of view, and told him frankly: "O Abu Talhah, a man like you could not be turned away, but you are a disbelieving man, and I am a Muslim woman. It is not permitted for me to marry you, but if you were to embrace Islam, that would be my dowry (*mahr*), and I would ask you for nothing more."[6]

He returned the following day to try to tempt her with a larger dowry and more generous gift, but she stood firm, and her persistence and maturity only enhanced her beauty in his eyes. She said to him, "O Abu Talhah, do you not know that your god whom you worship was carved by the carpenter slave of so-and-so? If you were to set it alight, it would burn." Her words came as a shock to Abu Talhah, and he asked himself, "Does the Lord burn?" Then he uttered the words: "*Ashhadu an laa ilaaha ill-Allah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul-Allah*."

Then Umm Sulaym said to her son Anas, with joy flooding her entire being, "O Anas, marry me to Abu Talhah." So Anas brought witnesses and the marriage was solemnized.

Abu Talhah was so happy that he was determined to put all his wealth at Umm Sulaym's disposal, but hers was the attitude of the selfless, proud, sincere believing woman. She told him, "O Abu Talhah, I married you for the sake of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), and I will not take any other dowry." She knew that when Abu Talhah embraced Islam, she did not only win herself a worthy husband, but she also earned a reward from Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) that was better than owning red camels (the most highly-prized kind) in this world, as she had heard the Prophet ﷺ say:
"If Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) were to guide one person to Islam through you, it is better for you than owning red camels."[7]

Such great Muslim women are examples worthy of emulation, from whom Muslim women may learn purity of faith, strength of character, soundness of belief and wisdom in choosing a husband.

She is obedient to her husband and shows him respect

The true Muslim woman is always obedient to her husband, provided that no sin is involved. She is respectful towards him and is always eager to please him and make him happy. If he is poor, she does not complain about his being unable to spend much. She does not complain about her housework, because she remembers that many of the virtuous women in Islamic history set an example of patience, goodness and a positive attitude in serving their husbands and taking care of their homes despite the poverty and hardships they faced. One of the foremost of these exemplary wives is Fatimah al-Zahra', the daughter of Muhammad ﷺ and

the wife of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (RAA). She used to complain of the pain in her hands caused by grinding grain with the hand-mill. Her husband ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib said to her one day, “Your father has brought some female slaves, so go and ask him for one of them to come and serve you.” She went to her father, but she felt too shy to ask him for what she wanted. ‘Ali went and asked him to provide a servant for his beloved daughter, but the Prophet could not respond to those who most dear to him whilst ignoring the needs of the poor among the Muslims, so he came to his daughter and her husband and said: “Shall I not teach you something that is better than that for which you asked me? When you go to bed at night, say ‘*Subhaan Allah*’ thirty-three times, ‘*Al-hamdu lillaah*’ thirty-three times, and ‘*Allahu akbar*’ thirty-four times. This is better for you than a servant.”

Then he bid them farewell and left, after giving them this divine help which would make them forget their tiredness and help them to overcome their exhaustion.

‘Ali (RAA) began to repeat the words that the Prophet had taught him. He said, “I never stopped doing that after he had taught me these words.” One of his companions asked him, “Not even on the night of Siffin?” He said, “Not even on the night of Siffin.”[8]

Asma’ bint Abi Bakr al-Siddiq served her husband al-Zubayr, and took care of the house. Her husband had a horse, which she took care of, feeding it and exercising it. She also repaired the water-bucket, made bread, and carried dates on her head from far away. Al-Bukhaari and Muslim report this in her own words:

“Al-Zubayr married me, and he had no wealth, no slaves, nothing except his horse. I used to feed his horse, looking after it and exercising it. I crushed date-stones to feed his camel. I used to bring water and repair the bucket, and I used to make bread but I could not bake it, so some of my *Ansari* neighbors, who were kind women, used to bake it for me. I used to carry the dates from the garden that the Prophet had given to al-Zubayr on my head, and this garden was two-thirds of a *farsakh* away. One day I was coming back with the dates on my head. I met the Messenger of Allah, who had a group of his Companions with him. He called me, then told his camel to sit down so that I could ride behind him. I told (al-Zubayr), ‘I felt shy, because I know that you are a jealous man.’ He said, ‘It is worse for me to see you carrying the dates on your head than to see you riding behind him.’ Later, Abu Bakr sent me a servant, who relieved me of having to take care of the horse; it was as if I had been released from slavery.”[9]

The true Muslim woman devotes herself to taking care of her house and husband. She knows her husband’s rights over her, and how great they are, as was confirmed by the Prophet’s words:

> “No human being is permitted to prostrate to another, but if this were permitted I would have ordered wives to prostrate to their husbands, because of the greatness of the rights they have over them.”[10]

And:

> “If I were to order anyone to prostrate to anyone else, I would have ordered women to prostrate to their husbands.”[11]
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> ‘A’ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) asked the Messenger of Allah : “Who has the greatest rights over a woman?” He said, “Her husband.” She asked, ‘And who has the greatest rights over a man?” He said, “His mother.”[12]
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> A woman came to ask the Prophet about some matter, and when he had dealt with it, he asked her, “Do you have a husband?” She said, “Yes.” He asked her, “How are you with him?” She said, “I never fall short in my duties, except for that which is beyond me.” He said, “Pay attention to how you treat him, for he is your Paradise and your Hell.”[13]

How can the Muslim woman complain about taking care of her house and husband when she hears these words of Prophetic guidance? She should fulfill her household duties and take care of her husband in a spirit of joy, because she is not carrying a tiresome burden, she is doing work in her home that she knows will bring reward from Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa).

The *Sahaabah*, may Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) be pleased with them, and those who followed them understood this Islamic teaching and transmitted it from the Prophet ﷺ. When a bride was prepared for marriage, she would be told to serve her husband and take care of his rights. Thus the Muslim woman knew her duties towards her husband, and down through the ages caring for her husband and being a good wife were established womanly attributes. One example of this is what was said by the *faqih* al-Hanbali ibn al-Jawzi in his book *Ahkam al-Nisa'* (p. 331): In the second century AH there was a righteous man called Shu'ayb ibn Harb, who used to fast and spend his nights in prayer. He wanted to marry a woman, and told her humbly, "I am a bad-tempered man." She replied, tactfully and cleverly, "The one who makes you lose your temper is worse than you." He realized that there stood before him a woman who was intelligent, wise and mature. He immediately said to her, "You will be my wife."

This woman had a clear understanding of how to be a good wife, which confirmed to the man who had come to seek her hand that she was a woman who would understand the psychology and nature of her husband and would know what would please him and what would make him angry; she would be able to win his heart and earn his admiration and respect, and would close the door to every possible source of conflict that could disrupt their married life. The woman who does not understand these realities does not deserve to be a successful wife; through her ignorance and shortcomings she may provoke her husband to lose his temper, in which case, she would be worse than him, for being the direct cause of his anger.

The tactful Muslim woman is never like this. She helps her husband to be of good character, by displaying different types of intelligence, cleverness and alertness in the way she deals with him. This opens his heart to her and makes him fond of her, because being a good wife is a not only a quality that she may boast about among her friends, but it is also a religious obligation for which Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) will call her to account: if she has done well, she will be rewarded, but if she has fallen short she will have to pay the penalty.

One of the most important ways in which the Muslim woman obeys her husband is by respecting his wishes with regard to the permissible pleasures of daily life, such as social visits, food, dress, speech, etc. The more she responds to his wishes in such matters, the happier and more enjoyable the couple's life becomes, and the closer it is to the spirit and teachings of Islam.

The Muslim woman does not forget that her obedience to her husband is one of the things that may lead her to Paradise, as the Prophet ﷺ said:

> "If a woman prays her five daily prayers, fasts her month (of Ramadan), obeys her husband and guards her chastity, then it will be said to her: 'Enter Paradise by whichever of its gates you wish.'"[14]

Umm Salamah (May Allah be pleased with her) said:

"The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Any woman who dies, and her husband is pleased with her, will enter Paradise.'"[15]

The Prophet ﷺ draw a clear and delightful picture of the well-behaved, easy-going, loving, righteous Muslim wife, one who will be happy in this world and the next:

"Shall I not tell you about your wives in Paradise?" We said, "Of course, O Messenger of Allah." He said, "They are fertile and loving. If she becomes angry or is mistreated, or her husband becomes angry, she says, 'My hand is in your hand; I shall never sleep until you are pleased with me.'"[16]

The true Muslim woman knows that Islam, which has multiplied her reward for obeying her husband and made it a means of her admittance to Paradise, has also warned every woman who deviates from the path of marital obedience and neglects to take care of her husband, that she will be guilty of sin, and will incur the wrath and curses of the angels.

Al-Bukhaari and Muslim report from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet ﷺ said:

"If a man calls his wife to his bed and she does not come, and he goes to sleep angry with her, the angels will curse her until the morning."[17]

Muslim reports from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said Imam:

"By the One in Whose hand is my soul, there is no man who calls his wife to his bed, and she refuses him, but the One Who is in heaven will be angry with her, until the husband is pleased with her once more."[18]

The angels' curse will befall every woman who is rebellious and disobedient; this does not exclude those who are too slow and reluctant to respond to their husbands:

"Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) will curse those procrastinating women who, when their husbands call them to their beds, say 'I will, I will . . .' until he falls asleep." [19]

Marriage in Islam is intended to protect the chastity of men and women alike, therefore it is the woman's duty to respond to her husband's requests for conjugal relations. She should not give silly excuses and try to avoid it. For this reason, several hadeeth urge a wife to respond to her husband's needs as much as she is able, no matter how busy she may be or whatever obstacles there may be, so long as there is no urgent or unavoidable reason not to do so.

In one of these hadeeth, the Prophet said:
"If a man calls his wife to his bed, let her respond, even if she is riding her camel [i.e., very busy]."[20]

And:
"If a man calls his wife, then let her come, even if she is busy at the oven."[21]

The issue of protecting a man's chastity and keeping him away from temptation is more important than anything else that a woman can do, because Islam wants men and women alike to live in an environment which is entirely pure and free from any motive of *fitnah* or *haraam* pleasures. The flames of sexual desire and thoughts of pursuing them through *haraam* means can only be extinguished by means of discharging that natural energy in natural and lawful ways. This is what the Prophet meant in the hadeeth narrated by Muslim from Jabir:

"If anyone of you is attracted to a woman, let him go to his wife and have intercourse with her, for that will calm him down."[22]

The warning given to the woman whose husband is angry with her reaches such an extent that it would shake the conscience of every righteous wife who has faith in Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and the Last Day: she is told that her prayer and good deeds will not be accepted, until her husband is pleased with her again. This is stated in the hadeeth narrated by Jabir from 'Abdullah:

"The Messenger of Allah said: 'There are three people whose prayers will not be accepted, neither their good works: a disobedient slave until he returns to his masters and puts his hand in theirs; a woman whose husband is angry with her, until he is pleased with her again; and the drunkard, until he becomes sober.'"[23]

When these hadeeth refer to the husband being angry with his wife, they refer to cases in which the husband is right and the wife is wrong. When the opposite is the case, and the husband is wrong, then his anger has no negative implications for her; in fact, Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) will reward the wife for her patience. But the wife is still required to obey her husband, so long as no sin is involved, because there should be no obedience to a created being if it entails disobedience to the Creator. Concerning this, the Prophet said:

"It is not permitted for a woman who believes in Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) to allow anyone into her husband's house whom he dislikes; or to go out when he does not want her to; or to obey anyone else against him; or to forsake his bed; or to hit him. If he is wrong, then let her come to him until he is pleased with her, and if he accepts her then all is well, Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) will accept her deeds and make her position stronger, and there

will be no sin on her. If he does not accept her, then at least she will have done her best and excused herself in the sight of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa)."[24].

Another aspect of wifely obedience is that she should not fast at times other than Ramadan except with his permission, that she should not allow anyone to enter his house without his permission, and that she should not spend any of his earnings without his permission. If she spends anything without him having told her to do so, then half of the reward for that spending will be given to him. The true Muslim woman takes heed of this teaching which was stated by the Prophet in the hadeeth:

"It is not permitted for a woman to fast when her husband is present, except with his permission; or to allow anyone into his house except with his permission; or to spend any of his earnings unless he has told her to do so, otherwise half of the reward will be given to him."[25]

According to a report given by Muslim, he said:

"A woman should not fast if her husband is present, except with his permission. She should not allow anyone to enter his house when he is present without his permission. Whatever she spends of his wealth without him having told her to do so, half of the reward for it will be given to him."[26]

The point here is the permission of the husband. If a wife gives some of his money in voluntary charity without his permission, then she will not receive any reward; on the contrary, it will be recorded as a sin on her part. If she wants to spend in his absence, and she knows that if he knew about it he would give his permission, then she is allowed to do so, otherwise it is not permitted.

Mutual understanding and harmony between husband and wife cannot be achieved unless there is understanding between them on such matters, so that neither of them will fall into such errors and troubles as may damage the marriage which Islam has built on a basis of love and mercy, and sought to maintain its purity, care and harmony.

If the husband is a miser, and spends too little on her and her children, then she is allowed to spend as much as she needs from his wealth on herself and her children, in moderation, without his knowledge. The Prophet stated this to Hind bint 'Utbah, the wife of Abu Sufyan, when she came to him and said, "O Messenger of Allah, Abu Sufyan is a stingy man. What he gives me is not enough for me and my child, unless I take from him without his knowledge." He told her, "Take what is enough for you and your child, in moderation."[27] Thus Islam has made women responsible for good conduct in their running of the household affairs. The Muslim woman understands the responsibility that Islam has given her, to take care of her husband's house and children by making her a "shepherd" over her husband's house and children. She has been specifically reminded of this responsibility in recognition of her role, in the hadeeth in which the Prophet made every individual in the Islamic society responsible for those under his or her authority in such a way that no-one, man or woman, may evade responsibility:

"Each of you is a shepherd, and each is responsible for those under his care. A ruler is a shepherd; a man is the shepherd of his family; a woman is the shepherd of her husband's house and children. For each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for those under his care."[28]

The true Muslim woman is always described as being loving towards her children and caring towards her husband. These are two of the most beautiful characteristics that a woman of any time or place may possess. The Prophet praised these two characteristics, which were embodied by the women of Quraysh, who represented the best women among the Arabs in terms of loving their children, caring for their husbands, respecting their rights and looking after their wealth with care, honesty and wisdom:

"The best women who ride camels are the women of Quraysh. They are the most compassionate towards their children when they are small, and the most careful with regard to their husbands' wealth."[29]

This is a valuable testimony on the part of the Prophet ﷺ, attesting to the psychological and moral qualities of the women of Quraysh which enhanced their beauty and virtue. This testimony represents a call to every Muslim woman to emulate the women of Quraysh in loving her children and taking care of her husband. These two important characteristics contribute to the success of a marriage, make individuals and families happy, and help a society to advance.

It is a great honor for a woman to take care of her husband every morning and evening, and wherever he goes, treating him with gentleness and good manners which will fill his life with joy, tranquility and stability. Muslim women have the best example in ‘A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her), who used to accompany the Prophet ﷺ on Hajj, surrounding him with her care, putting perfume on him with her own hands before he entered *ihram*, and after he finished his *ihram*, before he performed *tawaf al-ifadah*.[30] She chose for him the best perfume that she could find. This is stated in a number of *shih* hadeeth reported by Al-Bukhaari and Muslim, for example:

> “I applied perfume to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with my own hands before he entered the state of *ihram* and when he concluded it before circumambulating the House.”[31]
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> “I applied perfume to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with these two hands of mine when he entered *ihram* and when he concluded it, before he performed *tawaf*,” - and she spread her hands.[32]
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> ‘Urwah said:
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> “I asked ‘A'ishah, ‘With what did you perfume the Messenger of Allah ﷺ at the time when he entered *ihram*?’ She said, ‘With the best of perfume.’”[33]

According to another report also given by Muslim, ‘A'ishah said:

> “I applied the best perfume I could find to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ before he entered *ihram* and when he concluded it, before he performed *tawaf al-ifadah*.”[34]
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> When the Prophet ﷺ was in seclusion (*i'tikaf*), he would lean his head towards ‘A'ishah, and she would comb and wash his hair. Al-Bukhaari and Muslim both report this in *sahih* hadeeth narrated from ‘A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her), such as:
>
> “When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was in *i'tikaf*, he inclined his head towards me and I combed his hair, and he did not enter the house except to answer the call of nature.”[35]
>
> “I used to wash the Prophet's head when I was menstruating.”[36]

‘Aishah urged women to take good care of their husbands and to recognize the rights that their husbands had over them. She saw these rights as being so great and so important that a woman was barely qualified to wipe the dust from her husband's feet with her face, as she stated: “O womenfolk, if you knew the rights that your husbands have over you, every one of you would wipe the dust from her husband's feet with her face.”[37]

This is a vivid expression of the importance of the husband's rights over his wife. ‘A'ishah wanted to bring this to women's attention, so as to remove from the hearts of arrogant and stubborn women all those harsh, obstinate feelings that all too often destroy a marriage and turn it into a living hell.

Honoring and respecting one's husband is one of the characteristic attitudes of this *ummah*. It is one of the good manners known at the time of *jahiliyyah* that were endorsed by Islam and perpetuated by the Arabs after they embraced Islam. Our Arab heritage is filled with texts that eloquently describe the advice given by mothers to their daughters, to care for, honor and respect their husbands; these texts may be regarded as invaluable social documents.

One of the most famous and most beautiful of these texts was recorded by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Umayr al-Qurashi, who was one of the outstanding scholars of the second century AH. He quotes the words of advice given by Umamah bint al-Harith, one of the most eloquent and

learned women, who was possessed of wisdom and great maturity, to her daughter on the eve of her marriage. These beautiful words deserve to be inscribed in golden ink.

‘Abd al-Malik said: “When ‘Awf ibn Muhallim al-Shaybani, one of the most highly respected leaders of the Arab nobility during the *jahiliyyah*, married his daughter Umm Iyas to al-Harith ibn ‘Amr al-Kindi, she was made ready to be taken to the groom, then her mother Umamah came in to her, to advise her, and said:

> ‘O my daughter, if it were deemed unnecessary to give you this advice because of good manners and noble descent, then it would have been unnecessary for you, because you possess these qualities, but it will serve as a reminder to those who are forgetful, and will help those who are wise.
>
> ‘O my daughter, if a woman were able to do without a husband by virtue of her father’s wealth and her need for her father, then you of all people would be most able to do without a husband, but women were created for men just as men were created for them.
>
> ‘O my daughter, you are about to leave the home in which you grew up, where you first learned to walk, to go to a place you do not know, to a companion with whom you are unfamiliar. By marrying you he has become a master over you, so be like a servant to him, and he will become like a servant to you.
>
> ‘Take from me ten qualities, which will be a provision and a reminder for you.
>
> ‘The first and second of them are: be content in his company, and listen to and obey him, for contentment brings peace of mind, and listening to and obeying one’s husband pleases Allah.
>
> ‘The third and fourth of them are: make sure that you smell good and look good; he should not see anything ugly in you, and he should not smell anything but a pleasant smell from you. Kohl is the best kind of beautification to be found, and water is better than the rarest perfume.
>
> ‘The fifth and the sixth of them are: prepare his food on time, and keep quiet when he is asleep, for raging hunger is like a burning flame, and disturbing his sleep will make him angry.
>
> ‘The seventh and eighth of them are: take care of his servants (or employees) and children, and take care of his wealth, for taking care of his wealth shows that you appreciate him, and taking care of his children and servants shows good management.
>
> ‘The ninth and tenth of them are: never disclose any of his secrets, and never disobey any of his orders, for if you disclose any of his secrets you will never feel safe from his possible betrayal, and if you disobey him, his heart will be filled with hatred towards you.
> ‘Be careful, O my daughter, of showing joy in front of him when he is upset, and do not show sorrow in front of him when he is happy, because the former shows a lack of judgment, whilst the latter will make him unhappy.
>
> ‘Show him as much honor and respect as you can, and agree with him as much as you can, so that he will enjoy your companionship and conversation.
>
> ‘Know, O my daughter, that you will not achieve what you would like to until you put his pleasure before your own, and his wishes before yours, in whatever you like and dislike. And may Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) choose what is best for you and protect you.’”[38]

She was taken to her husband, and the marriage was a great success; she gave birth to kings who ruled after him.

This advice clearly included everything that one could think of as regards the good manners that a young girl needs to know about in order to treat her husband properly and be a suitable companion for him. The words of this wise mother deserve to be taken as the standard for every young girl who is about to get married.

If she is rich, the true Muslim woman does not let her wealth and financial independence make her blind to the importance of respecting her husband's rights over her. She still takes care of him and honors him, no matter how rich she is or may become. She knows that she is obliged to show gratitude to Allah for the blessings He has bestowed upon her, so she increases her charitable giving for the sake of Allah. The first person to whom she should give generously is her own husband, if he is poor; in this case she will receive two rewards, one for taking care of a family member, and another for giving charity, as the Prophet stated in the hadeeth narrated by Zaynab al-Thaqafiyyah, the wife of ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud (RAA):

“The Prophet told us: ‘O women, give in charity even if it is some of your jeweler.’ She said, ‘I went back to ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud and told him. ‘You are a man of little wealth, and the Prophet has commanded us to give charity, so go and ask him whether it is permissible for me to give you charity. If it is, I will do so; if it is not, I will give charity to someone else.’ ‘Abdullah said, ‘No, you go and ask.’ So I went, and I found a woman of the Ansaar at the Prophet's door, who also had the question. We felt too shy to go in, out of respect, so Bilal came out and we asked him, ‘Go and tell the Messenger of Allah that there are two women at the door asking you: Is it permissible for them to give *sadaqah* to their husbands and the orphans in their care? But do not tell him who we are.’ So Bilal went in and conveyed this message to the Prophet, who asked, ‘Who are they?’ Bilal said, ‘One of the women of the *Ansaar*, and Zaynab/’ The Prophet asked, ‘Which Zaynab is it?’ Bilal said, ‘The wife of ‘Abdullah.’ The Prophet said: ‘They will have two rewards, the reward for upholding the relationship, and the reward for giving charity.’”[39] According to a report given by Al-Bukhaari, he said, “Your husband and your child are more deserving of your charity.”[40]

The true Muslim woman is always careful to give thanks for Allah's blessings if her life is easy, and she never loses her patience if she encounters difficulty. She never forgets the warning that the Prophet issued to women in general, when he saw that most of the inhabitants of Hell will be women, and so she seeks refuge with Allah from becoming one of them.

Al-Bukhaari and Muslim narrated from Ibn ‘Abbas (RAA) that the Prophet said: “O women, give charity, for I have surely seen that you form the majority of the inhabitants of Hell.” They asked, ‘Why is this so, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Because you curse too much, and are ungrateful for good treatment (on the part of your husbands).”[41]

According to another report given by Al-Bukhaari, he said, “because they are ungrateful for good and kind treatment. Even if you treated one of them (these ungrateful women) well for an entire lifetime, then she saw one fault in you, she would say, ‘I have never seen anything good from you!’”[42]

According to a report given by Ahmad, a man said, “O Messenger of Allah, are they not our mothers and sisters and wives?” He said, “Of course, but when they are treated generously they are ungrateful, and when they are tested, they do not have patience.”[43]

When the true Muslim woman thinks about these *sahih* hadeeth which describe the fate of most women in the Hereafter, she is always on the alert lest she fall into the sins of ingratitude towards her husband, or frequent cursing, or denying her husband's good treatment of her, or forgetting to give thanks for times of ease, or failing to be patient at times of difficulty. In any case, she hastens to give charity as the Prophet urged all women to do, in the hope that it may save them from that awful fate which will befall most of those women who deviate from truth and let trivial matters distract them from

> remembering Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and the Last Day, and whose bad qualities will ultimately lead them into the Fire of Hell. The Muslim woman, on the other hand, sets the highest example of respect towards one's husband and taking note of his good qualities. This is the attitude of loyalty that befits the true Muslim woman who respects her husband's rights and does not ignore his virtues.

Muslim women's history is full of stories that reflect this loyalty and recognition of the good qualities of the husband. One of these stories is that of Asma' bint 'Umays, who was one of the greatest women in Islam, and one of the first women to migrate to Madinah. She was married to Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, then to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, then to 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with them all. On one occasion, her two sons Muhammad ibn Ja'far and Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr were competing with one another, each of them saying. "I am better than you, and my father is better than your father." 'Ali said to her, "Judge between them, O Asma'." She said, "I have never seen a young man among the Arabs who was better than Ja'far, and I have never seen a mature man who was better than Abu Bakr." 'Ali said, "You have not left anything for me. If you had said anything other than what you have said, I would have hated you!" Asma' said: "These are the best three, and you are one of them even if you are the least of them."[44]
What a clever and eloquent answer this wise woman gave! She gave each of her three husbands the respect he deserved, and pleased 'Ali, even though he was the least of them, because she included all of them in that group of the best.

She treats his mother and family with kindness and respect

One of the ways in which a wife expresses her respect towards her husband is by honoring and respecting his mother.

The Muslim woman who truly understands the teachings of her religion knows that the person who has the greatest right over a man is his mother, as we have seen in the hadeeth of 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) quoted above. So she helps him to honor and respect his mother, by also honoring and respecting her. In this way she will do herself and her husband a favor, as she will helping him to do good deeds and fear Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), as commanded by the Qur'aan. At the same time, she will endear herself to her husband, who will appreciate her honor and respect towards his family in general, and towards his mother in particular. Nothing could please a decent, righteous and respectful man more than seeing strong ties of love and respect between his wife and his family, and nothing could be more hateful to a decent man than to see those ties destroyed by the forces of evil, hatred and conspiracy. The Muslim family which is guided by faith in Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and follows the pure teachings of Islam is unlikely to fall into the trap of such *jahili* behavior, which usually flourishes in an environment that is far removed from the true teachings of this religion.

A Muslim wife may find herself being tested by her mother-in-law and other in-laws, if they are not of good character. If such is the case, she is obliged to treat them in the best way possible, which requires a great deal of cleverness, courtesy, diplomacy and repelling evil with that which is better. Thus she will maintain a balance between her relationship with her in-laws and her relationship with her husband, and she will protect herself and her marriage from any adverse effects that may result from the lack of such a balance.

The Muslim woman should never think that she is the only one who is required to be a good and caring companion to her spouse, and that nothing similar is required of her husband or that there is nothing wrong with him mistreating her or failing to fulfill some of the responsibilities of marriage. Islam has regulated the marital relationship by giving each partner both rights and duties. The wife's duties of honoring and taking care of her husband are balanced by the rights that she has over him, which are that he should protect her honor and dignity from all kinds of mockery, humiliation, trials or oppression. These rights of the wife comprise the husband's duties towards her: he is obliged to honor them and fulfill them as completely as possible.

One of the Muslim husband's duties is to fulfill his role of *qawwaam* (maintainer and protector) properly. This is a role that can only be properly fulfilled by a man who is a successful leader in his home and family, one who possesses likeable masculine qualities. Such a man has a

noble and worthy attitude, is tolerant, overlooks minor errors, is in control of his married life, and is generous without being extravagant. He respects his wife's feelings and makes her feel that she shares the responsibility of running the household affairs, bringing up the children, and working with him to build a sound Muslim family, as Islam wants it to be.

She endears herself to her husband and is keen to please him

The true Muslim woman is always keen to win her husband's love and to please him. Nothing should spoil his happiness or enjoyment of life. So she speaks kind words to him, and refrains from saying anything hurtful or upsetting. She brings him good news, but she keeps bad news from him as much as she can, or postpones telling it until a more suitable time when it will not upset him so much. If she finds that she has no alternative but to tell him upsetting news, she looks for the most suitable way to convey it, so that the blow will not be so hard on him. This is the wise approach and good conduct of the clever woman, but it is very difficult to attain and only a very few virtuous women ever do so.

One of those who did reach this high level was the great Muslim woman Umm Sulaym bint Milhan, the wife of Abu Talhah al-Ansari. Her son passed away whilst Abu Talhah was traveling, and her attitude was so unique that if Imam Muslim had not reported this story we would have taken it to be a mere myth. Let us hear her son Anas ibn Malik tell the story of his remarkable mother and her attitude:

"A son of Abu Talhah by Umm Sulaym died. Umm Sulaym told her family, 'Do not tell Abu Talhah about his son until I tell him about it.' Abu Talhah came home, so she prepared dinner for him, and he ate and drank. Then she beautified herself in a way that she had never done before, and he had sexual intercourse with her. When she saw that he was satisfied, she said, 'O Abu Talhah, do you think that if a people lent something to a household, then asked for it back, do they have the right not to return it?' He said, 'No.' She said, 'Then resign yourself to the death of your son.' Abu Talhah became angry and said, 'You let me indulge myself and then you tell me about my son!' He went to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and told him what had happened. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'May Allah bless both of you for this night!' Umm Sulaym became pregnant. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ went on a journey, and she accompanied him. Whenever the Messenger of Allah ﷺ came back from a journey, he never entered Madinah at night. When they (the traveling-party) approached Madinah, her labor-pains started. Abu Talhah stayed with her, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ went on ahead to Madinah. Abu Talhah said, 'O Lord, You know how I love to go out with Your Messenger when he goes out, and to come back with him when he comes back, and I have been detained, as You see.' Umm Sulaym said, 'O Abu Talhah, I do not feel as much pain as I did before, so let us go on.' When they reached (Madinah), her pains-pains started again, and she gave birth to a boy. My mother said to me, 'O Anas, nobody should feed him until you take him to the Messenger of Allah in the morning.' So when morning came, I took the baby to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and when I met him he was carrying an iron tool. When he saw me, he said, 'I hope that Umm Sulaym has given birth.' I said, 'Yes.' So he put down the tool and I brought the child to him and placed him in his lap. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ called for some of the dates of Madinah. He chewed it until it became soft, then he put it in the baby's mouth and the baby began to smack his lips. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'See how much the Ansaar love dates!' Then he wiped the baby's face and named him 'Abdullah."[45]

How great was Umm Sulaym's faith, and how magnificent her patience and virtue! How bravely she hid her pain from her husband and endeared herself to him. She managed to conceal her grief at the loss of her beloved son and spent that time with her husband patiently hoping that by being a good wife to her husband she might earn the pleasure of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa). This is true, deep and sincere faith.

Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) answered the Prophet's prayer for Umm Sulaym and her husband, and she became pregnant from that night. When she was heavily pregnant, she saw her husband Abu Talhah preparing to set out on another military campaign with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. She insisted on partaking of the honor of *jihad* with him alongside the

Messenger of Allah ﷺ, even though she was in the later stages of pregnancy. Her husband took pity on her because of the difficulties of the journey and the heat of the desert, but he still asked the Prophet ﷺ for permission to let her come with him, and he gave his permission because he knew her strength of character and love of *jihad*.

Umm Sulaym was present when the Muslims were triumphant at Makkah, and when they were sorely tested at Hunayn. She stood firm, as solid as a rock, alongside her husband and the small group of believers around the Prophet ﷺ, even though she was pregnant, at that most difficult time when many others had fled, and she remained there until Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) brought victory to the believers.

The *mujahid* army returned to Madinah, and her labor began. When the pains became intense, she and her husband stayed behind for a while, but her husband prayed to his Lord in the still of night because he loved to go out and return with the Prophet ﷺ. Suddenly the pains ceased; she told her husband and they set out to follow the army that had gone on ahead. They caught up with them, and after they had entered Madinah, Umm Sulaym's labor pains began anew. She gave birth to a boy, and his brother on his mother's side, Anas, brought him to the Prophet ﷺ, who fed him a small amount of dates (*tahnik*) and named him 'Abdullah. The prayer of the Prophet ﷺ for this baby was fulfilled, as among his descendents were ten great scholars.

No doubt Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) knew the sincerity of Umm Sulaym's faith, and conveyed the good news of Paradise to her via His Prophet ﷺ:
"I entered Paradise, and heard footsteps. I said, 'Who is this?' and they told me, 'It is al-Ghumaysa', the daughter of Milhan, the mother of Anas ibn Malik.'"[46]

Another example of the ways in which a wife may endear herself to her husband is the way in which 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) spoke to the Prophet ﷺ when he came back to his wives after he had kept away from them for a month. He had said, "I will not go in to them for a month," because he was so angry with them. When twenty-nine days had passed, he came to 'A'ishah first. 'A'ishah said to him, 'You swore to stay away from us for a month, and only twenty-nine days have passed; I have been counting them." The Prophet ﷺ said, "This month has twenty-nine days." That particular month had only twenty-nine days.[47]

'A'ishah's telling the Prophet ﷺ that she had counted twenty-nine days was a clear indication of her love towards her husband and of how she had waited, day by day, hour by hour, for him to come back to her. It shows how she loved and missed her husband. This approach made her even dearer to him, so when he came back to his wives, he started with her.

The sincere Muslim woman recognizes her husband's likes and habits, and tries to accommodate them as much as she can, in the interests of mutual understanding and marital harmony, and to protect the marriage from the boredom of routine. This is what every wise and intelligent wife does. It was narrated that the *qadi* and *faqih* Shurayh married a woman from Banu Hanzalah. On their wedding night, each of them prayed two *rak'ahs* and asked Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) to bless them. Then the bride turned to Shurayh and said, "I am a stranger, and I do not know much about you. Tell me what you like, and I will do it, and tell me what you do not like so I may avoid it." Shurayh said, "She stayed with me for twenty years, and I never had to tell her off for anything, except on one occasion, and I was in the wrong then."

This is the respectful and loving wife as Islam wants her to be, responsible for her home and loyal to her husband, and always careful to maintain a good relationship between them. If anything happens to upset their marriage, she hastens to calm the situation with her sincere love and wise understanding. She does not listen to the whispering of the *Shaytan* which calls her to do wrong, and she never hastens to ask her husband for a divorce. The marriage bond should be too strong to be undone by temporary arguments or occasional misunderstandings. The Prophet ﷺ warned those foolish women who ask their husbands for a divorce with no legitimate reason that they would be denied even the scent of Paradise:

"Any woman who asks her husband for a divorce with no good reason will be deprived of even smelling the scent of Paradise."[48]

She does not disclose his secrets

The chaste Muslim woman does not disclose her husband's secrets, and does not talk to anyone about whatever secrets and other matters there may be between him and her. The serious Muslim woman is above that; she would never sink to the level of such cheap and shameless talk as goes on amongst the lowest type of people. Her time is too precious to be wasted in such vulgar behavior. She would never accept for herself to be counted as one of those people whom the Prophet described as one of the worst types:

"Among the worst type of people in the sight of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) on the Day of Judgment is a man who enjoys his wife's intimate company, and she enjoys his intimate company, then one of them goes and discloses the secret of the other."[49]

Talking about that which is private between a husband and wife is one of the most abhorrent ways of disclosing secrets. No one does such a thing but the worst type of people. There are some secrets the disclosure of which is not as bad as disclosing this secret, but in any case, telling secrets at all is disliked and is unacceptable. Keeping secrets in itself is a worthy and virtuous deed, whilst disclosing them is a serious error and shortcoming, from which nobody can be immune except the infallible Prophet. The disclosure of a secret that the Prophet had entrusted to Hafsah, who told it to 'A'ishah, led to the plotting and intrigue in his household that caused him to keep away from his wives for a whole month, because he was so upset with them.[50] Concerning this, the following *ayah* was revealed:

(When the Prophet disclosed a matter of confidence to one of his consorts, and she then divulged it [to another], and Allah made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, 'Who told you this?' He said, 'He told me Who knows and is well-acquainted [with all things].) (Qur'aan 66:3)

The two women concerned are then confronted with their error, and called to repent, so that they might draw closer to Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) after having distanced themselves by their deed, otherwise Allah would be his (the Prophet's) Protector, and Jibril and the righteous believers would also support him:

(If you two turn in repentance to Him, your hearts are indeed so inclined; but if you back up each other against him, truly Allah is his Protector, and Gabriel, and [every] righteous one among those who believe - and furthermore, the angels - will back [him] up.) (Qur'aan 66:4)

Then they are issued with a stern warning and the terrifying prospect that if they persist in their error, they may lose the honor of being the wives of the Prophet:

(It may be, if he divorced you [all], that Allah will give him in exchange Consorts better than you - who submit [their wills], who believe, who are devout, who turn to Allah in repentance, who worship [in humility], who travel [for Faith] and fast - previously married or virgins.) (Qur'aan 66:5)

This incident presents a valuable lesson to the Muslim woman on the importance of keeping her husband's secret, and the effect this confidentiality has on the stability of the individual and the home. One of the greatest blessings that Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) has bestowed on the Muslims in particular, and on mankind in general, is that he has made the public and private life of His Messenger like an open book, in which can be read the teachings of this *'aqeedah* and its practical application in real life. Nothing is secret or hidden: matters and events that people usually keep secret are discussed openly in the Qur'aan and Sunnah, even unavoidable human weaknesses. All of these issues are presented in order to teach people right from wrong.

The *Sahaabah*, may Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) be pleased with them, understood that the Prophet's life was entirely devoted to Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and His message, so why should they keep secret or conceal any aspect of his life? The stories that have been

narrated about his life, his household and his wives represent a practical application of the words he preached, and for this reason, the *Sahaabah* (may Allah reward them with all good) transmitted the most precise details of his life, and did not fail to record any aspect of his daily life, whether it was major or minor. This is part of the way in which Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) caused the life of his Prophet to be recorded, including details of the precise way in which Islamic teachings were applied in his life. This is in addition to the Qur'aanic references to the Prophet's life, which form a record that will remain until heaven and earth pass away.

She stands by him and offers her advice

One of the laws that Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) has decreed for this life is that men and women should work together to cultivate and populate the earth and run the affairs of life therein. Man cannot do without woman, and vice versa. Hence the laws of Islam teach men and women to co-operate in all matters. Islam encourages a man to help his wife, as much as he is able; the Prophet ﷺ, who is the example for all Muslims, used to help and serve his family until he went out to pray, as the Mother of the Believers 'A'ishah said.[51]

Just as Islam expects a man to help his wife with housework and running household affairs, so the woman is also expected to help him in dealing with the outside world and to play her role in life by offering her opinions and advice, and supporting him in practical terms.

History tells us that Muslim women engaged in *jihad* side by side with men, marching to war with them, bringing water to the thirsty, tending the wounded, setting broken bones, stemming the flow of blood, encouraging the soldiers, and sometimes joining in the actual fighting, running back and forth between the swords and spears, standing firm when some of the brave men had fled. Their courageous conduct in battle was praised by the Prophet ﷺ, as we have described previously (see pp. 69-91).

However, women's contribution to public life did not stop on the battlefield; women also stood side-by-side with men at times of peace, offering their valuable opinions, soothing their hearts at times of stress and supporting them during times of hardship.

History has recorded many names of great Muslim men who used to seek and follow the advice of their wives, foremost among whom is the Prophet himself ﷺ, who sometimes followed the advice of Khadijah, Umm Salamah, 'A'ishah and others among his wives. 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr used to follow the advice of his mother Asma', al-Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik used to follow the advice of his wife Umm al-Banin bint 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Marwan, and Harun al-Rashid used to follow the advice of his wife Zubaydah, and there are many other such examples in the history of Islam.

The true, sincere Muslim woman understands the heavy burden that Islam has placed on her shoulders, by obliging her to be a good wife to her husband, to surround him with care and meet his every need, to give him enjoyment, and to renew his energy so that he may fulfill his mission in life. So she does not withhold her advice when she sees that he needs it, and she never hesitates to stand by his side, encouraging him, supporting him and offering advice and consolation.

The first Muslim woman, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid is the best example of a woman who influenced her husband. The Prophet ﷺcame to her on the day of the first Revelation, anxious, trembling and shaking all over. He told her, "Cover me, cover me!" She hastened to offer her help and support, advising him and thinking of a practical way of helping him. Al-Bukhaari and Muslim report the story told by 'A'ishah of how the Revelation commenced, and the marvelous way in which Khadijah responded by supporting her husband:

"The Revelation started in the form of a dream that came true, he never saw a dream but it would clearly come to pass. Then he was made to like seclusion, so he would go and stay alone in the cave of Hira', praying and worshipping for many nights at a time, before coming back to his family to collect supplies for another period of seclusion. Then the truth came suddenly, when he was in the cave of Hira'. The angel came to him and said 'Read!' He said,

'I am not a reader.' [The Prophet said:] 'The angel embraced me and squeezed me until I nearly passed out, then released me, and said, 'Read!' I said, 'I am not a reader.' The angels embraced me a second time, squeezed me until I nearly passed out, then released me and said, 'Read!' I said, 'I am not a reader.' The angel embraced me a third time and squeezed me until I nearly passed out, then released me and said:

(**Read! In the name of your Lord and Cherisher, who created - created man, out of a [mere] clot of congealed blood: Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful - He Who taught [the use of] the Pen - taught man that which he knew not.)** (Qur'aan 96:1-5)'"

The Messenger of Allah came back to Khadijah, trembling all over, and said, "Cover me, cover me!". They covered him up until he calmed down, then he said to Khadijah, "O Khadijah, what is wrong with me?" He told her what had happened, then said, "I fear for myself." Khadijah said: "No, rather be of good cheer, for by Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) would never forsake you. By Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), you uphold the ties of kinship, speak the truth, spend money on the needy, give money to the penniless, honor your guests and help those beset by difficulties. She took him to Waraqah ibn Nawfal ibn Asad ibn 'Abd al-'Uzza, who was her cousin, the son of her father's brother. He was a man who had become a Christian during the time of *jahiliyyah*; he could write the Arabic script and he had written as much of the Gospel in Arabic as Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) willed. He was an old man who had become blind. Khadijah said to him, "O Uncle, listen to your nephew." Waraqah ibn Nawfal said, "O son of my brother, what has happened?" The Messenger of Allah told him what had happened, and Waraqah said to him, "This is al-Namus (i.e., Jibril), who was sent down to Musa, upon whom be peace. I wish that I were a young man, and could be alive when your people cast you out." The Messenger of Allah asked, "Will they really cast me out?" Waraqah said, "Yes. No man has ever come with what you have brought, but his people were hostile towards him. If I live to see that day I will give you all the support I can."[52]

This report is strong evidence of Khadijah's wifely perfection, wisdom, strength of character, steadfastness, understanding and deep insight. She knew the Prophet's outstanding character, good conduct and purity of heart, and this made her certain that Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) would never forsake a man such as Muhammad or permit any bad fate to befall him. She knew that behind this remarkable new event that had overwhelmed the Messenger of Allah lay something great that Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) had prepared for His Messenger, so she spoke her kind and sweet words of encouragement, filling him with confidence, tranquility and firm conviction: "Be of good cheer, O cousin, and stand firm. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Khadijah, I hope that you will be the Prophet of this nation."[53] Then she took him to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who had knowledge of the Torah and Gospel, and told him what had happened to the Prophet.

The first Mother of the Believers, Khadijah (May Allah be pleased with her), was a sincere adviser in the way of Islam to the Prophet. She had already earned the great status and lasting fame of being the first person to believe in Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and His Messenger, and she stood beside her husband the Prophet, supporting him and helping him to bear the worst oppression and persecution that he faced at the beginning of his mission; she endured along with him every hardship and difficulty that he was confronted with.

Ibn Hisham says in his *Sirah*: "Khadijah had faith, and believed in what he brought from Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa). In this way, Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) helped His Prophet. Whenever he heard any hateful words of rejection or disbelief that upset him, Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) would cause his spirits to be lifted when he came back to her. She encouraged him to be patient, believed in him, and made it easier for him to bear whatever the people said or did. May Allah have mercy on her."[54]

She was a woman who always spoke the truth, and carried this burden sincerely. It is no surprise that she earned the pleasure of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and deserved to be honored by Him, so He conveyed the greeting of *salam* to her through His Messengers Jibril and Muhammad ﷺ, and gave her glad tidings of a house in Paradise, as is stated in the hadeeth narrated by Abu Hurayrah:

"Jibril came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, Khadijah is coming to you with vessels containing food and drink. When she comes to you, convey to her the greeting of *salam* from her Lord and from me, and give her the glad tidings of a house of pearls in Paradise, in which there is no noise or hard work."[55]

The true Muslim woman puts her mind to good work, thinks hard and gives advice to her husband at times when he may be most in need of advice. By doing so, she does a great favor for her husband, and this is one of the ways in which she may treat him well.

Another of these great stories which feature correct advice given by a woman is the reaction of the Muslims to the treaty of al-Hudaybiyah, and Umm Salamah's reaction, which demonstrated her deep insight and great wisdom.

Umm Salamah (May Allah be pleased with her) was one of those who were with the Prophet ﷺ when he went to Makkah to perform 'Umrah in 6 AH. This is the journey that was interrupted by Quraysh, who prevented the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions from reaching the Ka'bah. The treaty of al-Hudaybiyah was drawn up between the Prophet ﷺ and Quraysh. This was a peace-treaty which was intended to put an end to the fighting for ten years; it was also agreed that if anyone from Quraysh came to Muhammad without the permission of his guardian, he would be returned, but if any of the Muslims came to Quraysh, he would not be returned, and that the Muslims would go back that year without entering Makkah, etc.
By virtue of his deep understanding that was derived from the guidance of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), the Prophet ﷺ understood that this treaty, which appeared to be quite unfair to the Muslims, was in fact something good and represented a great victory for Islam and the Muslims.
The *Sahaabah*, however, were dismayed when they learned the content of the treaty. They saw it as unfair and unjust, especially as they had the upper hand at that time. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab expressed the angry feelings of the *Sahaabah* when he went to Abu Bakr and asked him: "Is he not the Messenger of Allah?" Abu Bakr said, "Of course." "Are we not Muslims?" "Yes." "Are they not *mushrikin*?" "Yes." "Why should we accept this deal which is so humiliating to our religion?" Abu Bakr warned him, "O 'Umar, follow his orders. I bear witness that he is the Messenger of Allah." Umar said, "And I bear witness that he is the Messenger of Allah." Then 'Umar went to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and asked him questions similar to those he had asked Abu Bakr. But when he asked, "Why should we accept this deal which is so humiliating to our religion?" the Prophet ﷺ replied, "I am the servant of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and His Messenger; I will never disobey His command, and He will never forsake me."[56]

Then 'Umar realized that his haste to oppose the treaty was a mistake. He used to say, "I kept giving charity, fasting, praying and freeing slaves because of what I had done and said on that day, until I hoped that ultimately it would be good for me (because it made me perform so many good deeds)."[57]

When the Prophet ﷺ had ratified the treaty, he commanded his Companions to get up, slaughter their sacrificial animals, and shave their heads, but none of them got up[58]. He told them three times to do this, but not one of them responded. He went to his wife Umm Salamah, and told her what he was facing from the people. At this point the wisdom and intelligence of Umm Salamah become quite clear: she told him, "O Messenger of Allah, go out and do not speak to any of them until you have sacrificed your animal and shaved your head."
The Prophet ﷺ took her advice, and did as she suggested. When the *Sahaabah* saw that, they rushed to sacrifice their animals, pushing one another aside, and some of them began to shave one another's heads, until they were almost fighting with one another because of their distress and grief, and their regret for having disobeyed the Prophet.[59]

After that, the Muslims came back to their senses, and they understood the Prophet's great wisdom in agreeing to this treaty, which in fact was a manifest victory, because many more people entered Islam after it than had before. In *Sahih Muslim* it states that the *ayah*,

*(**Verily We have granted you a manifest Victory)*** (Qur'aan 48:1) referred to the treaty of al-Hudaybiyah. The Prophet sent for 'Umar and recited this *ayah* to him. 'Umar said, "O Messenger of Allah, it is really a victory?" He said, "Yes," so then 'Umar felt at peace.[60]

She encourages her husband to spend for the sake of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa)

Another way in which the true Muslim woman supports her husband is by encouraging him to spend and give charity for the sake of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), and not to waste money in extravagance and ostentatious purchases, as we see so many ignorant and misguided women doing.

The alert Muslim woman always wants goodness and success for her husband, so she urges him to do good deeds, and to do more of them, because she believes that by doing this, she will increase her honor in this world and her reward in the next.

One of the beautiful stories narrated about a woman's encouraging her husband to spend for the sake of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) is the story of Umm al-Dahdah. When her husband came to her and told her that he had given in charity the garden in which she and her children used to live, in hopes of receiving a bunch of dates[61] in Paradise, she said, "You have got a good deal, you have got a good deal." The Prophet commented, "How many bunches of dates Abu'l-Dahdah will have in Paradise!" and he repeated this several times.[62]

She helps him to obey Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa)

One of the qualities of the good Muslim wife is that she helps her husband to obey Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) in different ways, especially to stay up and pray at night (qiyaam al-layl). By doing this, she does him an immense favor, because she reminds him to do something he might otherwise forget or neglect. Thus she causes him, and herself, to be covered by the mercy of Allah.

What a beautiful picture the Prophet drew of the married couple helping one another to obey Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and do good deeds, and entering into the mercy of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) together. This comes in the hadeeth narrated by Abu Hurayrah (RAA), who said:

"The Messenger of Allah said: 'May Allah have mercy on the man who gets up at night to pray and wakes up his wife to pray, and if she refuses, he sprinkles water in her face. And may Allah have mercy on the woman who gets up at night to pray, and wakes her husband up to pray, and if he refuses, she sprinkles water in his face."[63]

She fills his heart with joy

The clever and sensitive Muslim woman does not forget that one of the greatest deeds she can do in life, after worshipping Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), is to be successful in endearing herself to her husband and filling his heart with joy, so that he will feel in the depths of his heart that he is happy to be married to her, and enjoys living with her and being in her company. So she uses her intelligence to find ways and means of opening his heart and filling it with joy and happiness, so that she may become the queen of his heart. She understands that she is the greatest joy of a man in this world, as is stated in the hadeeth narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As (RAA), in which the Prophet said:

"This world is nothing but temporary conveniences, and the greatest joy in this world is a righteous woman."[64]

She does not forget that she is the greatest joy in this life for a man, if she knows how to endear herself to him. If she does not know how to endear herself to him then in most cases she will be a source of unhappiness and misery to her husband, as was confirmed by the Prophet ﷺ:

"Three things make the son of Adam happy, and three make him miserable. Among the things that make the son of Adam happy are a good wife, a good home and a good means of transport; the things that make him miserable are a bad wife, a bad home and a bad means of transport."[65]

Hence being a good wife, and endearing oneself to one's husband, are a part of religion, because this offers protection to a man by helping him to remain chaste, and strengthens the foundations of the family, thus bringing happiness to her husband and children.

The Muslim woman by nature likes to endear herself to her husband; in doing so she finds a way of fulfilling her femininity and her inclinations to make herself attractive. But for the Muslim woman, the matter goes even further: in seeking to win her husband's heart, she is also seeking to earn the pleasure of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), Who has made being a good wife a part of religion, about which she will be questioned in the Hereafter. So she does not spare any effort in her loving treatment of her husband: she presents a pleasing appearance, speaks pleasantly and kindly, and is a clever and likeable companion.

She makes herself beautiful for him

She makes herself beautiful for her husband by means of make-up, clothing, etc., so that she will appear more beautiful and attractive, and thus make her husband happy. This was the practice of the righteous women of the *salaf*, who used to devote their time to worshipping Allah and reading Qur'aan. Foremost among them were 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) and others; they used to wear fine clothes and jeweler at home and when they were traveling, in order to make themselves look beautiful for their husbands.

Bakrah bint 'Uqbah came to 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) and asked her about henna. 'A'ishah said, "It comes from a good tree and pure water." She asked her about removing body hair, and she said, "If you have a husband, and you could remove your eyes and replace them with something better, then do it."[66]

Let those careless women who neglect their appearance in front of their husbands listen to the advice of 'A'ishah, and realize that their beauty should be primarily for their husbands, not for their friends and peers. Those women who are failing to make themselves beautiful for their husbands are sinners, because they are falling short in one of the greatest duties of marriage. Their negligence may be the cause of their husbands staying away from them and looking at other women.

The wife whose husband only ever sees her with unkempt hair, looking pale and wan and wearing shabby old clothes, is a foolish and disobedient wife. It will be of no help to her if she rushes to beautify herself only when receiving guests, or going to a women's party, but remains looking shabby most of the time in front of her husband. I think that the Muslim woman who is truly guided by the teachings of Islam will be safe from such shortcomings, because she treats her husband properly, and a woman who treats her husband properly is most unlikely to fail in fulfilling her duty towards him.

It is one of the teachings of Islam that a woman should make herself look beautiful for her husband, so that her husband should only ever see of her that which he likes. So it is forbidden for a woman to dress in mourning for more than three days, except in the case of her husband's death, when she is permitted to mourn for four months and ten days. We find proof of this in the hadeeth narrated by Al-Bukhaari from Zaynab the daughter of Umm Salamah, who said, "I came to Zaynab bint Jahsh, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ when her brother died. She called for perfume and applied it to herself, then said, "I am not wearing perfume because I need to, but because I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say from the *minbar*:

“It is not permitted for a woman who believes in Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) and the Last Day to grieve for more than three days, except for her husband, (for whom she may grieve) four months and ten days.”[67]

She is cheerful and grateful when she meets him

One of the ways in which the Muslim woman makes herself attractive to her husband is by being happy, cheerful, friendly and gentle, thus flooding her husband’s life with joy. When he comes home exhausted from his work, she greets him with a smiling face and kind words. She puts her own concerns to one side for a while, and helps him to forget some of his worries. She appears as cheerful and serene as she can, and expresses her gratitude to him every time he does something good for her.

The true Muslim woman is fair-minded, and is never ungrateful to any person, because the teachings of her religion protect her from falling into the error of bad behavior and ingratitude for favors. How then could she be ungrateful to her husband, her beloved lifelong companion? She knows well the teaching of the Prophet :

“He does not thank Allah who does not thank people.”[68]

She understands from this that every person who does good deeds and favors deserves thanks and recognition, so how could she hesitate or fail to show gratitude to her husband, especially when she hears the words of the Prophet :

“Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) will not look at the woman who does not thank her husband at the time when she cannot do without him.”[69]

She shares his joys and sorrows

Another of the ways in which a woman may endear herself to her husband is by sharing his joys and sorrows. So she joins him in some of his pastimes, and his daily work, such as reading, exercise, and attending useful talks and gatherings, and so on, so that her husband will feel that he is not alone in his enjoyment of the good things in life, but that he is sharing these pleasures with a loving, intelligent and loyal wife.
The fact that the Prophet raced with ‘A’ishah more than once indicates the fact that Islam urges both spouses to share their partner’s joy and happiness in life, because this sharing will have a powerful effect in deepening their feelings for one another and strengthening the bonds between them.

Just as she shares his joys, so she also shares his worries and concerns, and comes to him with kind words of consolation, mature and sensible advice and sincere emotional support.

She does not look at other men

The true Muslim woman avoids looking at men other than her husband; she does not stare at men who are not related to her (i.e. who are not her *mahrams*), in obedience to the command of Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa):

***(And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze . . .)* (Qur’aan 24:31).**

By refraining from looking at other men, she will be one of those chaste women who restrain their glances, which is a quality men like in women, because it is indicative of their purity, decency and fidelity. This is one of the most beautiful characteristics of the chaste, decent, pure Muslim woman, and this was referred to in the Qur’aan when it speaks of the women of Paradise and their qualities that are loved by men:

(In them will be [Maidens] chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or *jinn* before them has touched.) (Qur’aan 55:56)

She does not describe other women to him

Another of the characteristics of the intelligent Muslim woman is that she does not describe any of her (female) friends or acquaintances to him, because this is forbidden according to the words of the Prophet ﷺ:

"No woman should talk about another woman, or describe her to her husband (so that it is) as if he sees her."[70]

Islam wants people's hearts to be at peace, and to put a stop to provocative thoughts and overactive imaginations, so that people may live their lives in a decent and calm fashion, free from such thoughts and able to go about the tasks and duties for which they were created. No man should let his mind be occupied with cheap thoughts of the contrast between his wife and the woman she describes, or let himself become crazy with the embellishments his own imagination may add to the woman's supposed beauty. He should not let such foolish talk stop him from going about his work and usual pastimes, or lead him to temptation and make him go astray.

She tries to create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility for him

The Muslim woman does not only make herself beautiful for her husband and share his work and pastimes, but she also tries to create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility in the home. So she tries to keep a clean and tidy home, in which he will see order and good taste, and clean, well-mannered, polite children, and where good meals are prepared regularly. The clever woman also does whatever else she can based on her knowledge and good taste. All of this is part of being a good Muslim wife as enjoined by Islam.

The true Muslim woman does not forget that according to Islam marriage is one of the signs of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa). Islam has made the wife a source of tranquility, rest and consolation for her husband:

> **And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your [hearts] . . . (Qur'aan 30:21)**

Marriage is the deepest of bonds which Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) ties between one soul and another, so that they may enjoy peace, tranquility, stability and permitted pleasures. The wife is a source of refuge, security and rest for her husband in a marital home that is filled with sincere love and compassionate mercy. The truly-guided Muslim woman is the best one to understand this lofty meaning and to translate it into a pleasant and cheerful reality.

She is tolerant and forgiving

The Muslim woman is tolerant and forgiving, overlooking any errors on the part of her husband. She does not bear a grudge against him for such errors or remind him about them every so often. There is no quality that will endear her to her husband like the quality of tolerance and forgiveness, and there is nothing that will turn her husband against her like resentment, counting faults and reminding him about his mistakes.

The Muslim woman who is following the guidance of Islam obeys the command of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa):

(. . . Let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that Allah should forgive you?. . .) (Qur'aan 24:22)

Such a woman deserves to be the queen of her husband's heart and to fill his soul with joy and happiness.

She is strong in character and wise

Among the most prominent characteristics of the Muslim woman are her strength of character, mature way of thinking, and serious conduct. These are qualities which the Muslim

woman possesses both before and after marriage, because they are the result of her understanding of Islam and her awareness of her mission in life.

She exhibits this strength of character when she is choosing a husband. She does not give way to her father's whims if he has deviated from the right way and is seeking to force her into a marriage that she does not want. Neither does she give in to the man who comes to seek her hand in marriage, no matter how rich or powerful he may be, if he does not have the qualities of a true Muslim husband.

After marriage, her character remains strong, even though she is distinguished by her easy-going nature, mild-tempered behavior and loving obedience to her husband. Her strength of character comes to the fore especially when she has to take a stand in matters concerning her religion and *'aqeedah*, as we have seen in some of the narratives referred to previously, such as Umm Sulaym bint Milhan, who insisted on adhering to Islam along with her son Anas, although her husband Malik ibn al-Nadar remained a *mushrik*, opposed to his wife being Muslim (see p. 166-168); and Umm Habibah bint Abi Sufyan who remained steadfast in her Islam when her husband 'Ubayd-Allah ibn Jahsh al-Asadi became an apostate and joined the religion of the Abyssinians (see p. 98-101); and Barirah who was determined to separate from her husband whom she did not love, even though the Prophet tried to intervene on his behalf (see p. 162-163); and the wife of Thabit ibn Qays ibn Shammas, who demanded a divorce from her husband whom she did not love either, and the Prophet accepted her request (see p. 162).

The primary motive of these women in taking up such a strong stance was their concern to adhere to Islam, to keep their belief (*'aqeedah*) pure, and ultimately to please Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa).

Each of them was seeking that which is *halaal* in her married life, and feared committing any *haraam* deed, either because she was married to a man who did not share her religious beliefs, or she was falling short in her duties towards a husband whom she did not love or could not live with. If it were not for their strength of character and feelings of pride in themselves and their faith, they would have followed the commands of the misguided husbands and would have found themselves going astray, choking on the misery of living with a husband they could not truly accept. The courage of these women shows how the true Muslim women should be, no matter where or when she lives.

But the Muslim woman's strength of character should not make her forget that she is required to obey her husband, treating him with honor and respect. Her strength of character should make her strike a wise balance in the way she speaks and acts towards him, with no inconsistency or carelessness. Even in those moments of anger which are unavoidable in a marriage, she should control herself and restrain her tongue, lest she say anything that could hurt her husband's feelings. This is the quality of a strong, balanced character.

'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) represents the highest example of this good quality, and every Muslim woman should follow her example. The way in which she swore an oath when she was happy with her husband, the Prophet , was different from the way she spoke when she was upset with him. This is an example of good manners and respect. It was something that the Prophet noticed, as she narrated that he said:

"I know when you are happy with me and when you are upset with me." She said, "How do you know that?" He said, "When you are happy with me, you say, 'No, by the Lord of Muhammad,' and when you are upset with me, you say, 'No, by the Lord of Ibrahim.'" She said, "Yes, that is right. By Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), O Messenger of Allah, I only keep away from your name."[71]
What refined manners and sincere love!

'A'ishah's strength of character became even more prominent when she was tried with the slander (*al-ifk*) which Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) made a test for His Messenger and

for all the *ummah*, raising the status of some and lowering that of others, increasing the faith of those who were guided and increasing the loss of those who went astray.

Her strength of character and deep faith in Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) became apparent, and her trust in Him alone to prove her innocence was quite clear. I can find no more beautiful description of the deep and sincere faith of 'A'ishah and her trust in the justice of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), than that given by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, who said:

"The test was so severe that the Revelation ceased for a month because of it, and nothing at all concerning this issue was revealed to the Messenger of Allah during that time, so that the wisdom behind what had happened might become completely apparent and the sincere believers might be increased in faith and adherence to justice and might think well of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), His Messenger, the Messenger's family and those believers who spoke the truth. The *munafiqun*, meanwhile, would be increased only in sins and hypocrisy, and their true nature would be exposed to the Prophet and the believers. 'A'ishah, the one who had spoken the truth, and her parents would be shown to be true servants of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) who had received His full blessing. Their needs for Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) and desire to draw closer to Him would increase; they would feel humble before Him and would put their hope and trust in Him, instead of hoping for the support of other people. 'A'ishah would despair of receiving help from any created being, and she passed this most difficult test when her father said, 'Get up and thank him,' after Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) had sent down a Revelation confirming her innocence. She said, 'By Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), I will not get up and thank him; I will only give thanks to Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) Who has revealed my innocence.'

"Another aspect of the wisdom behind the Revelation being suspended for a month was that people would focus solely on this issue and examine it closely; the believers would wait with eager anticipation to hear what Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) would reveal to His Messenger concerning this matter. The Revelation came like rain on parched land, when it was most needed by the Messenger of Allah and his family, by Abu Bakr and his family, by the *Sahaabah* and by the believers, and it brought them great relief and joy. If Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) had revealed the truth of the matter from the first instant, then the wisdom behind this event would have been obscured and a great lesson would have been lost.

"Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) wanted to demonstrate the status of His Prophet and his family in His sight, and the honor which He had bestowed upon them. He Himself was to defend His Messenger and rebuke his enemies, in such a way that the Prophet had nothing to do with it. Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) alone would avenge His Prophet and his family.

"The Messenger of Allah was the target of this slander, and the one who was accused was his wife. It was not appropriate for him to declare her innocence, although he knew that she was indeed innocent, and never thought otherwise. When he asked people to avenge him of those who had spread the slander, he said: 'Who could blame me if I were to punish those who slandered my family? By Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), I have never known anything but good from my family, and they have told me about a man from whom I have never known anything but good, and he never came in my house except with me.' He had more proof than the believers did of 'A'ishah's innocence, but because of his high level of patience, perseverance and deep trust in Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), he acted in the appropriate manner until the Revelation came that made his heart rejoice and raised his status, showing to his *ummah* that Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) was taking care of him.

"Whoever examines 'A'ishah's response, when her father told her to get up and thank the Messenger of Allah, and she said, 'No, I will give thanks only to Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa),' will realize the extent of her knowledge and the depth of her faith. She attributed this blessing to Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) alone, and gave thanks only to Him. She had a sound grasp of *Tawhid*, and demonstrated great strength of character and confidence in her innocence. She was not curious or anxious about the outcome when she spoke thus,

because she was sure that she had done nothing wrong. Because of her faith in the Prophet's love for her, she said what she said. She became even dearer to him when she said, 'I will not give thanks except to Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa), for He is the One Who has revealed my innocence.' She displayed remarkable maturity and steadfastness when her dearly beloved husband, whom she could not bear to be apart from, kept away from her for a month; then when the matter was resolved and he wished to come back to her, she did not rush to him, despite her great love for him. This is the highest level of steadfastness and strength of character."[72]

It is indeed the highest level of maturity and strength of character. The true Muslim woman is humble, kind, loving and obedient towards her husband, but she does not allow her character to weaken before him, even if he is the most beloved of all people towards her, and the most noble and honorable of all human beings, so long as she is in the right and is adhering to the way of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa). 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) set the highest example of the strength of character of the Muslim woman who is proud of her religion and understands what it is to be a true servant of Allah (subhaanahu wa 'ta'aalaa) alone.

The Muslim woman should interpret 'A'ishah's attitude as an attitude of superiority or arrogance, pushing her husband away. We have already explained the duties of the Muslim woman towards her husband i.e., obedience, loving kindness and seeking to please him, in accordance with Islamic teachings. What we learn from the attitude of 'A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) is the esteem and honor with which Islam regards woman, so long as she adheres to the laws and teachings of Islam. This is what gives her character strength, pride, honor and wisdom.

Islam gives women rights and recognition which are envied by Western women when they hear about women's rights in Islam (see p. 92), This has been freely admitted by women's liberation activists in Arab countries, as we have seen (see p. 58). Many of them have retracted their claims that Muslim women need to be liberated; one such activist is Dr. Nawaal El-Saadawi, who was interviewed for the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Watan* (mid-August 1989).

Dr. El-Saadawi was asked, "Do you think that the European women are an example to be copied?" She replied, "No, not at all. European women have advanced in some fields, but are backward in others. The marriage laws in Europe oppress women, and this is what led to the development of women's liberation movements in those countries and in America, where this movement is very strong and is even at times quite vicious."

Then she remarked: "Our Islamic religion has given women more rights than any other religion has, and has guaranteed her honor and pride, but what has happened is that men have sometimes used certain aspects of this religion to create a patriarchal class system in which males dominate females."

Clearly this patriarchal oppression mentioned by Dr. El Saadawi, which has led to the oppression of women, has been caused by ignorance of the true teachings of Islam.

She is one of the most successful wives

This discussion of the intellectual, psychological and other qualities of the smart Muslim wife demonstrates that she is a successful wife, if not the most successful wife and the greatest blessing and good fortune that a man may enjoy.

By virtue of her understanding of Islamic teaching, and her fulfilling her duties towards her husband, she becomes the greatest joy of her husband's life: when he comes home, she greets him with a warm and friendly smile, speaking kindly and sweetly, looking attractive and smart, with a clean and tidy house, pleasant conversation, and a table full of good food, pleasing him and making him happy.

She is obedient, kind and loving towards her husband, ever eager to please him. She does not disclose his secrets or upset his plans. She stands beside him at times of hardship, offering her support and wise advice. She shares his joys and sorrows. She endears herself

to him by the way she looks and behaves, and fills his life with joy and happiness. She encourages him to obey Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) in different ways, and motivates him by joining him in different activities. She respects his mother and family. She refrains from looking at other men. She keeps away from foolish and worthless talk. She is keen to provide an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and stability for her husband and children. She is strong of character without being rude or aggressive, and is kind and gentle without being weak. She earns the respect of those who speak to her. She is tolerant and forgiving, overlooking errors and never bearing grudges.

Thus the Muslim wife deserves to be the most successful wife. She is the greatest blessing that Allah (subhaanahu wa ‘ta’aalaa) may bestow upon a man, and an incomparable source of joy in this life. The Prophet ﷺ indeed spoke the truth when he said:

“This world is nothing but temporary conveniences, and the greatest joy in this world is a righteous woman.”[73]

Footnotes:

1. Sahih Muslim 10/56, Kitab al-rida', bab istihbab nikah al-bikr.

2. See Fath al-Bari, 9/194, Kitab al-nikah, bab ikrah al-bint 'ala al-zawaj; Ibn Majah, 1/602, Kitab al-nikah, bab man zawwaja ibnatahu wa hiya karihah; al-Mabsut 5/2.

3. Fath al-Bari, 9/395, Kitab al-talaq, bab al-khul'.

4. Fath al-Bari, 9/408, Kitab al-talaq, bab shafa'at al-Nabi (r) fi zawj Barirah.

5. A hasan hadith narrated by Tirmidhi, 2/274, Abwab al-nikah, 3; and by Ibn Majah, 1/633, Kitab al-nikah, bab al-akfa'.

6. Reported by al-Nisa'i with a sahih isnad, 6/114, Kitab al-nikah, bab al-tazwij 'ala'l-Islam.

7. Fath al-Bari, 7/476, Kitab al-maghazi, bab ghazwat Khaybar.

8. See Fath al-Bari, 7/71, Kitab fada'il al-Sahabah, bab manaqib 'Ali ibn Abi Talib; Sahih Muslim, 17/45, Kitab al-dhikr wa'l-du'a', bab al-tasbih awwal al-nahar wa 'ind al-nawm.

9. See Fath al-Bari, 9/319, Kitab al-nikah, bab al-ghirah.

10. Reported by Ahmad and al-Bazzar; the men of its isnad are rijal al-sahih. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 9/4, Bab haqq al-zawj 'ala'l-mar'ah.

11. A hasan sahih hadith, narrated by Tirmidhi, 2/314, in Abwab a-rida', 10.

12. Reported by al-Bazzar with a hasan isnad. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 4/308, Bab haqq al-zawj 'ala'l-mar'ah.

13. Reported by Ahmad and al-Nisa'i with jayyid isnads, and by al-Hakim, who said that its isnad was sahih. See al-Mundhiri, Al-Targhib wa'l-Tarhib, 3/52, Kitab al-nikah.

14. Reported by Ahmad and al-Tabarani; its narrators are thiqat. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 4/306, Bab haqq al-zawj 'ala'l-mar'ah.

15. Ibn Majah, 1/595, Kitab al-nikah, bab haqq al-zawj 'ala'l-mar'ah; al-Hakim, 4/173, Kitab al-birr wa'l-silah; he said its isnad is sahih.

16. Reported by al-Tabarani. Its narrators are those whose reports are accepted as sahih. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 4/312.

17. Fath al-Bari, 9/294, Kitab al-nikah, bab idha batat al-mar'ah muhajirah firash zawjiha; Sahih Muslim, 10/8, Kitab al-nikah, bab tahrim imtina' al-mar'ah min firash zawjiha.

18. Sahih Muslim, 10/7, Kitab al-nikah, bab tahrim imtina' al-mar'ah min firash zawjiha.

19. A sahih hadith narrated by al-Tabarani in al-Awsat and al-Kabir. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 4/296, bab fi man yad'u zawjahu fa ta'talla.

20. Reported by al-Bazzar, whose narrators are rijal al-sahih. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 4/312.

21. A hasan sahih hadith narrated by Tirmidhi, 2/314, abwab al-rida', 10, and by Ibn Hibban, Sahih, 9,473, kitab al-nikah.

22. Sahih Muslim, 9/178, Kitab al-nikah, bab nadab man ra'a imra'atan fa waqa'at fi nafsihi ila an ya'ti imra'atahu.

23. Reported by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih, 12/178, Kitab al-ashribah, 2, fasl fi'l-ashribah.

24. Reported by al-Hakim, 2/190, Kitab al-nikah; he said its isnad is sahih.

25. Fath al-Bari, 9/295, Kitab al-nikah, bab la ta'dhan al-mar'ah fi bayt zawjiha li ahad illa bi idhnihi.

26. Sahih Muslim, 7/115, Kitab al-zakah, bab ajr al-khazin wa'l-mar'ah idha tasaddaqat min bayt zawjaha.

27. Al-Bukhaari & Muslim. See Sharh al-Sunnah, 9/327, Kitab al-'iddah, bab nafaqah al-awlad wa'l-aqarib.

28. Al-Bukhaari & Muslim. See Sharh al-Sunnah, 9/327, Kitab al-imarah wa'l-qada': bab al-ra'i mas'ul 'an ra'iyatihi.

29. See Sahih Muslim, 16/81, Kitab fada'il al-Sahabah, bab min fada'il nisa' Quraysh.

30. Tawaf al-ifadah is one of the important rites of Hajj. It is done on the tenth day of Dhu'l-Hijjah after sacrificing an animal and shaving one's head. [Translator]

31. Sahih Muslim, 8/99, kitab al-Hajj, bab istihbab al-tib qabl al-ihram.

32. Fath al-Bari, 3/585, Kitab al-Hajj, bab al-tib.

33. Sahih Muslim, 8/100, kitab al-Hajj, bab istihbab al-tib qabl al-ihram.

34. Sahih Muslim, 8/100, kitab al-Hajj, bab istihbab al-tib qabl al-ihram.

35. Sahih Muslim, 3/208, Kitab al-hayd, bab jawaz ghusl al-ha'id ra'as zawjiha wa tarjiluhu.

36. Fath al-Bari, 1/403, Kitab al-hayd, bab mubashirah al-ha'id; Sahih Muslim, 3/209, Kitab al-hayd, bab jawaz ghusl al-ha'id ra'as zawjiha.

37. Reported as sahih by Ibn Hibban, and with a jayyid isnad by al-Bazzar; its narrators are well-known and are thiqat. See Ibn al-Jawzi, Ahkam al-nisa', p. 311.

38. Jamharah khutab al-'arab, 1/145.

39. Fath al-Bari, 3/328, Kitab al-zakat, bab al-zakat 'ala'l-zawj wa'l-aytam fi'l-hijr; Sahih Muslim, 7/86, Kitab al-zakat, bab al-zakat 'ala'l-aqarib.

40. Fath al-Bari, 3/325, Kitab al-zakat, bab al-zakat 'ala'l-aqarib.

41. Fath al-Bari, 3/325, Kitab al-zakat, bab al-zakat 'ala'l-aqarib; Sahih Muslim, 2/65, Kitab al-iman, bab bayan naqsan al-iman bi naqs al-ta'at.

42. Fath al-Bari, 1/83, Kitab al-iman, bab kufran al-'ashir.

43. Reported by Ahmad, 3/428; its narrators are rijal al-sahih.

44. Al-tabaqat al-kubra, 7/208-209.

45. Sahih Muslim, 16/11, Kitab fada'il al-Sahabah, bab fada'il Umm Sulaym.

46. See Sahih Muslim, 16/11, Kitab fada'il al-Sahabah, bab fada'il Umm Sulaym.

47. From a lengthy hadith narrated by Al-Bukhaari and Muslim. See Fath al-Bari, 5/116, Kitab al-mazalim, bab al-ghurfah wa'l-'aliyyah al-mushrifah; Sahih Muslim, 7/195, Kitab al-siyam, bab bayan an al-shahr yakun tis'an wa 'ishrin.

48. A hasan sahih hadith, reported by Tirmidhi, 2/329, abwab al-talaq, 11; Ibn Hibban, 9/490, Kitab al-nikah, bab ma'ashirah al-zawjayn.

49. Sahih Muslim, 10/8, Kitab al-nikah, bab tahrim ifsha' sirr al-mar'ah; Al-targhib wa'l-tarhib, 3/86, Kitab al-nikah, bab al-tarhib min ifsha' al-sirr bayna al-zawjayn.

50. The story of the Prophet's keeping way from his wives is narrated by al-Al-Bukhaari, Muslim and others. See Fath al-Bari, 5/116, kitab almazalim, bab al-ghurfah wa'l-aliyyah al-mushrifah, and 8/656, kitab al-tafsir, Surat al-Tahrim; Sahih Muslim, 7/195, Kitab al-siyam, bab bayan an al-shahr yakun tis'an wa 'ishrin.

51. See Fath al-Bari, 2/162, Kitab al-adhan, bab man kana fi hajah ahlihi.

52. Fath al-Bari, 1/23, Kitab bad' al-wahy, bab hadith 'A'ishah awwal ma bada'a bihi al-wahy; Sahih Muslim, 2/197, Kitab al-iman, bab bad' al-wahy.

53. Al-sirah, 1/254.

54. Ibid., 1/257.

55. Al-Bukhaari & Muslim. See Sharh al-Sunnah, 14/155, Kitab fada'il al-Sahabah, bab manaqib Khadijah.

56. Al-Sirah, 3/331; see also Fath al-Bari, 6/281, Kitab al-jizyah wa'l-mawadi'ah, bab hadith Sahl ibn Hanif; Sahih Muslim, 12/141, Kitab al-jihad wa'l-siyar, bab sulh al-Hudaybiyah.

57. Al-Sirah 3/331.

58. The Prophet (r) was telling his Companions to end the state of ihram which they had entered in order to perform 'Umrah. They had been prevented from entering Makkah, and were to wait until the following year to perform 'Umrah, but they did not want to abandon their

hope of performing 'Umrah on this occasion. They did not want to accept the deal that had been struck with the Quraysh, hence they were reluctant to end their ihram. [Translator]

59. Zad al-Ma'ad, 3:295, al-Tabari, 2/124.

60. Sahih Muslim, 12/141, Kitab al-jihad wa'l-siyar, bab sulh al-Hudaybiyah.

61. See Sahih Muslim, 8/33, Kitab al-jana'iz, bab al-lahd wa nasab al-laban 'ala'l-mayit.

62. Reported by Ahmad and al-Tabarani; its narrators are rijal al-sahih. See also Majma' al-Zawa'id, 9/324, Kitab al-manaqib, bab ma ja'a fi Abi'l-Dahdah.

63. Reported by Abu Dawud, 2/45, in Kitab al-salah: bab qiyam al-layl, and by al-Hakim 1/309, Kitab salah al-tatawwu'; he said that it is sahih according to the consitions of Muslim.

64. Sahih Muslim, 10/56, Kitab al-rida', bab istihbab nikah al-bikr.

65. Reported by Ahmad, 1/168; its narrators are rijal al-sahih.

66. Ibn al-Jawzi, Ahkam al-Nisa', 343.

67. Fath al-Bari, 9/484, Kitab al-talaq, bab ihdad al-mutawafa 'anha zawjuha.

68. Reported by Al-Bukhaari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, 1/310, Bab man la yashkur al-nas.

69. Reported by al-Hakim in al-Mustadrak, 2/190, Kitab al-nikah; he said it is a hadith whose isnad is sahih.

70. See Fath al-Bari, 9/338, Kitab al-nikah, bab tabashir al-mar'ah al-mar'ah fatana'atha li zawjiha.

71. See Sahih Muslim, 15/203, Kitab fada'il al-Sahabah, bab fada'il Umm al-Mu'minin 'A'ishah.

72. Zad al-Ma'ad, 3/261-264.

73. Sahih Muslim, 10/56, Kitab al-rida', bab istihbab nikah al-bikr.